



This manual has been scanned by the
Vickers MG Collection & Research Association

www.vickersmg.org.uk

Please support the work of the Association.

Click on the image to donate through
PayPal:



Or regularly support us through
Patreon:



Or make a quick, single donation:



A not-for-profit company, limited by guarantee, registered in England, Company Registration Number 07855202

293

NOT TO BE PUBLISHED

The information given in this document is not to be communicated, either directly or indirectly, to the Press or to any person not holding an official position in His Majesty's Service.

26/G.S. Pubns./282

**NOT TO BE TAKEN INTO
FRONT LINE TRENCHES**

OPERATIONS

MILITARY TRAINING PAMPHLET

No. 23

PART VI.—WITHDRAWAL

1940

*Prepared under the direction of
The Chief of the Imperial General Staff*

THE WAR OFFICE,
May, 1940.

CONTENTS

SEC.		PAGE
	Distribution	2 of cover
1.	General	1
2.	Conduct of the withdrawal	2
3.	Withdrawal of the rear guard	5
4.	The army in the withdrawal	7
5.	The corps in the withdrawal	7
6.	The division in the withdrawal	8
7.	Divisional cavalry regiments in the withdrawal ..	9
8.	Artillery in the withdrawal	10
9.	Infantry in the withdrawal	10
10.	Army tanks in the withdrawal	11
11.	Engineers in the withdrawal	12
12.	Signals in the withdrawal	12
13.	Gas in the withdrawal	13
14.	Preparation and execution of demolitions.. ..	14
15.	The air in the withdrawal	15

DISTRIBUTION

The scale of distribution is the same as for Pamphlet No. 23, Part I.

Military Training Pamphlet No. 23—Operations—is the main title of a series of pamphlets which will contain the latest ideas on subjects dealt with in Field Service Regulations, Volume II, 1935.

Pamphlets already issued are:—

Part I.—General Principles, Fighting Troops and their Characteristics (with Supplement).

II.—Defence.

III.—Appreciations, Orders, Intercommunication, and Movements.

IV.—Protection.

V.—The Use of Gas in the Field.

MILITARY TRAINING PAMPHLET

No. 23

Part VI.—1940

WITHDRAWAL

1. General

1. As an operation of war the withdrawal calls for the fullest exercise of the trained imagination of the commander, of the powers of organization and improvisation of the administrative staff and services, and of the most careful forethought by both commanders and staffs.

A withdrawal may be staged under widely varying circumstances. The extreme case on the one hand is where a commander withdraws voluntarily, probably in order to conform to the movement of forces elsewhere; in such a case his object will often be to disengage the major portion of his force, using the remainder in order to hold off the enemy and gain time for the preparation of a defensive position some distance in rear. The opposite extreme may comprise an involuntary withdrawal caused by pressure from the enemy, either on the front or flanks; in such a case the commander's first object is to endeavour to stabilize the situation.

This pamphlet considers the action of those troops who, under any set of circumstances within the extremes envisaged above, are concerned with the actual process of withdrawal in the face of the enemy.

2. The most important principles that will govern the action to be taken during a withdrawal are economy of force and security.

Though during the withdrawal it will often be necessary to stand for a given time on a particular line and the withdrawal itself will end in a determined stand or the resumption of the offensive, it is the duty of every body of troops which has been ordered to withdraw to carry out that withdrawal in such a manner that it suffers the smallest possible losses in men and material. One of the most effective ways, however, of ensuring this result is for the withdrawing troops to lose no opportunity of inflicting losses upon the enemy, and so to instil in him a caution that will reduce interference with the withdrawal to a minimum.

3. A withdrawal, forced or voluntary, requires the most careful preparation possible in the time available. Time for the preparation of the initial plan will often be short, especially if the withdrawal is forced as a result of an unsuccessful action. *Every commander*, down to and including divisional commanders, should therefore have in mind the possibility of withdrawal and be prepared to put into effect the necessary arrangements at any time.

4. It is especially necessary to maintain a high standard of discipline during a withdrawal, when the moral depression of supposed failure and the hardships of continued marching tend to lower it.

5. The most important feature of the arrangements which have to be made during a withdrawal is timely and comprehensive reconnaissance.

Reconnaissance is required of the various positions to be held, the routes for withdrawal, bivouac area for those troops who are not in contact with the enemy, and so forth.

Reconnaissances must start as soon as the plan has progressed sufficiently for reconnaissance for the first moves to be possible.

As all the ground can be reached without enemy interference, reconnaissance will be continuous and will be pushed on until the detailed moves have all been planned and prepared.

2. Conduct of the withdrawal

1. The first step in the process of withdrawal will be the establishment of fresh troops on a position in rear of those troops which are in contact with the enemy and through which the latter can retire. This position should be at such a distance that the troops occupying it will be given time to devise an effective defence—including the preparation of a co-ordinated fire plan—before the position is reached by the enemy.

2. Subsequently the withdrawal is carried out by a step by step movement to the rear from position to position, each of which must be occupied and organized before the position in front is evacuated. *The force employed should be strong in fire power, but reduced to the minimum consistent with safety in terms of men and vehicles*; every vehicle which can properly be dispensed with should be got away to the rear. It is generally essential that fresh troops should be made available to hold each new position in turn. If, however, the enemy does not follow up the withdrawal closely, it may be possible for the same body to hold two or more successive positions.

3. *During the whole withdrawal it is essential to present the enemy with an unbroken front.* The withdrawal must, therefore, be co-ordinated along the whole army front. This co-ordination will generally be achieved by the higher commander, who will name the general lines of the successive positions to be held *and state the times up to which those positions are to be denied to the enemy.*

By the time stated the next position to be held in the withdrawal must be occupied and prepared for defence.

4. *As the enemy is likely to utilize his aircraft both to impede the withdrawal and to gain information whenever possible, the bulk of the movement must be carried out by night.* A system of withdrawal is then evolved whereby the successive positions are held during the hours of daylight, and the troops in rear rested. Each of these positions is then vacated in turn during the hours of darkness—apart from some troops who are left to keep the position alive till dawn.

The advance of the enemy during the hours of daylight must then be harassed and delayed by the employment of mobile forces, by the fire of long range artillery, and by air attack.

5. *The successive positions to be held should be at such a distance that the enemy will be unable to advance from one to the next and deliver a properly co-ordinated attack against it in the hours of daylight of one day.*

Positions should be naturally strong and should, if possible, be behind a natural tank obstacle.

They should provide good facilities for covered movement in rear and, wherever possible, good observation and long fields of fire must be looked for. The latter desiderata may, however, be difficult to attain if the tank obstacle is a river in a wide valley.

6. As positions will only be required to be held for a limited time, great depth can be dispensed with and a correspondingly greater frontage can be held by any given body of troops than would be possible in a normal defensive position.

Rear guard positions should be made as strong as possible. Digging will generally have to be limited to the construction of weapon pits, both for the sake of concealment and because the amount of work to be done must be limited to allow of adequate rest.

The defences will be organized in localities which must be intersupporting, and provided with adequate support by artillery, anti-tank guns, and machine guns.

7. As strong a front as possible must be shown to the enemy, and *the front must be continuously defended.* As the

greatest danger which can threaten an extended force is penetration, with the consequent outflanking of the remainder of the position, co-ordination on the flanks of formations and units must be given special attention.

8. A successful withdrawal will almost certainly necessitate the employment of extensive demolitions. Tactical demolitions consist of :—

- i. Minor demolitions designed to give local relief from pressure—such as temporary road blocks and the destruction of small road bridges and culverts.
- ii. Major demolitions designed to create serious physical obstacles, and to secure a breathing space for the preparation of the defensive position on which the withdrawing force will finally stand.

Major demolitions will be most effective when they provide a complete belt in which the enemy will be compelled to undertake extensive repair operations. If, as is probable, time and resources do not permit of complete demolitions on a wide front, major demolitions will have their maximum value when they are planned so as to impede the enemy on the lines of advance most favourable to him. Isolated demolitions—not falling under the headings of i and ii above—over which the enemy can improvise crossings, or round which he can make deviations, will have little effect in delaying his advance, and can seldom warrant the labour expended in their construction.

If the enemy has used gas and the employment of gas is therefore permissible, the value of demolitions can be greatly enhanced by heavy contamination with blister gas. (See Sec. 13.)

The superior commander will normally draw up and put into execution the plan of work, informing the rear guard commander of the details of the plan. Further details regarding demolitions are given in Sec. 14.

9. Good administrative arrangements in a withdrawal will be of the greatest importance. All transport and stores not essential to the fighting troops should be sent directly to the rear at the earliest opportunity, and evacuation of civilians from the areas behind the army must, if possible, be made in sufficient time to ensure that refugees do not block communications required by the troops. Traffic control must be established immediately. To decrease the density on the main roads every endeavour must be made to develop cross-country routes. Supply of ammunition, petrol, and rations will require special consideration, and to save transport it may

frequently be advantageous to dump such supplies for withdrawing troops. If this is done, special steps must be taken to ensure that the units for whom they are intended do in fact receive them.

The exhaustion of troops will be mitigated if use can be made of mechanical transport to convey by long bounds the troops required to occupy the rear positions.

10. The moves of headquarters in a withdrawal require special consideration. Headquarters of formations and units in contact with the enemy should be well forward until all arrangements have been made for the withdrawal and the necessary steps taken to cover it.

The commander must then choose the time for his own withdrawal. He must be well forward initially in order to meet unexpected contingencies due to enemy action, to keep personal touch, and to be able then to exercise personal command. On the other hand, if he delays his own withdrawal too long he may not give himself time to assume control on the next position.

11. The withdrawal from the original position and from subsequent rear guard positions will be conducted on similar lines. *Every endeavour must be made to obtain surprise.* By whatever means it is achieved—whether in time, place, or method—careful arrangements must be made to conceal the movements of troops and transport to the rear. It may be necessary for the commander to lay down in his orders that there will be *no withdrawal before* a time to be specified.

3. Withdrawal of the rear guard

1. To co-ordinate the withdrawal of troops holding a rear-guard position, it will usually be necessary to give three timings in orders:—

- i. The time before which no troops will be withdrawn.
- ii. The time up to which the position will be denied or at which it will be abandoned.
- iii. The time by which rear parties will be clear of a certain line.

2. If a rear guard commander is responsible for holding one position only up to a given time, another formation or unit having been placed on the next position to his rear, his sole duty, when he has achieved his first task of holding his position, will be to disengage his troops and place them behind the next rear guard position as quickly and with as little loss as possible

If, on the other hand, he has to hold two or more successive positions, he must ensure that the troops to hold the next position behind him are in position in sufficient time to allow of the organization of the position for defence before the position in front of it is abandoned.

3. The hour at which a position is to be abandoned will have a considerable influence on the method of withdrawal. If the bulk of the troops are to be able to utilize the hours of darkness for their move, the most suitable hour for the final abandonment of a position will be shortly before dawn. Provided the enemy has been unable to close with the position in sufficient time to prepare an evening attack, he is also unlikely to be able to stage a night attack, and considerable thinning of the position can be begun at an early hour after nightfall.

The degree of thinning out, and the time at which it can begin, will depend on the proximity or otherwise of the enemy, his strength, equipment, morale, ground, and the strength of the position. The most important quality in a rear guard commander is the ability to appreciate the relative importance of these various factors and to extricate his troops without loss—whilst holding off the enemy as long as is required.

If the final withdrawal has to be made by day, or if the situation of the rear guard is such that their disengagement at night is likely to prove difficult without the enemy becoming at once aware of it, it may be necessary to place a portion of the force on an intermediate position from which to cover by fire the withdrawal of the rearmost troops. The holding of such an intermediate position has no part in the higher commander's plan, and it should not be held longer than is necessary to fulfil the task for which it was manned.

4. The rear party line referred to in Sec. 3, 1 (iii) must be easily recognizable on the ground. The time by which rear parties will be clear of it will usually be dawn or shortly after.

5. Should a rear guard be attacked and a footing be gained by the enemy on the rear guard position before the time at which the latter is to be abandoned, the rear guard commander will have to decide whether to counter attack, or whether he will achieve the object of the higher commander by a local withdrawal and the holding of an intermediate position. This decision will depend on a variety of factors, of which time, and space, the nature of the ground, and the positions of the troops on his flanks, are likely to have a considerable influence. As there will seldom be time for him to refer to higher authority, the rear guard commander must trust his military judgment,

In any event, it is important that he should have a reserve under his hand with which to carry out either of these tasks. Army tanks may usefully form part of such a reserve if available. Counter attacks carried out by a rear guard should be given strictly limited objectives.

4. The army in the withdrawal

1. The army commander, under direction of G.H.Q., will be responsible for laying down the general lines to be held and the hours up to which they will be held. He will also detail corps boundaries, and these should be taken well to the rear.

2. Army troops not required to be allotted to formations, or for work behind the fighting troops, should be moved to the rear without delay.

3. The selection of the primary belt of demolitions will be the responsibility of the army commander under direction of G.H.Q., and the bulk of the R.E. resources in the army will be required at an early stage to prepare this belt.

4. Reserve formations will generally be required to relieve hard pressed formations in the line. Such reliefs will best be effected by deploying such formations on a position in rear of that on which the formations to be relieved are fighting, and by allowing the latter to withdraw into reserve through the former.

5. The corps in the withdrawal

1. Corps commanders will be responsible for defining in greater detail the lines laid down to be held by the higher commanders, and for allotting divisional boundaries.

2. In corps of two divisions the corps commander is unlikely to be able to assemble a reserve other than his corps troops. In corps of three divisions, one division may be in reserve when the withdrawal starts. The corps commander can then keep this division in reserve to relieve one of his forward divisions, as and when required, or can employ it to take over a portion of the front, thus reducing the frontage on which each division will have to fight and so simplifying their problems.

3. The movement and siting of the corps artillery can generally best be done under corps. Some of the corps artillery will often, however, be left in action as late as possible—the final withdrawal of such guns to be made under the orders of forward divisions, under whose command they must therefore be placed for the purpose.

6. The division in the withdrawal

1. The divisional commander will arrange for the reconnaissance of the positions laid down by higher commanders and will define the foremost defended localities to be held in each withdrawal position. The method of withdrawing from these positions will depend upon a number of factors, which will often be conflicting. Among these will be :—

- i. The suitability of roads and communications— which will usually be the governing factor in the divisional commander's choice of method.
- ii. The morale of the enemy and the vigour of his advance.
- iii. Ground—and especially the relative natural strength of the positions to be held.
- iv. The width of the divisional front.

2. The two extremes in the method of carrying out the withdrawal will be :—

- i. On a one brigade front.
- ii. On a three brigade front.

3. Under i, each brigade in turn will carry out the duties of rear guard. By this means it should not be necessary for the same brigade ever to hold more than one position in three. Thus an opportunity is obtained of giving each brigade in turn some rest, and at all times the divisional commander will have a reserve under his hand. The rear guard on each position has one commander, thus allowing the divisional commander to concentrate his attention on planning the continuance of the withdrawal and preparing the various positions to be held. The main disadvantage of this method is that brigades are likely to be fighting on very wide fronts, and their commanders faced with the problems of maintaining control and retaining a reserve.

4. Under ii, the infantry brigade commander will be faced with a somewhat similar problem to that of the divisional commander under para. 2, above—how to hold his successive positions. The division will have to co-ordinate the withdrawal of the rear guards of the brigades, and decisions on thinning out will have to be made by the divisional commander and orders issued by him accordingly.

Troops will, however, get little or no rest, and the divisional headquarters will be fully occupied most of the time in controlling the forward troops, with less time to plan and prepare the rearward positions.

5. An intermediate course between the above will be to fight on a one brigade front, where the position to be held is so naturally strong as to make this suitable, putting up two brigades to hold those positions that require greater numbers. This method has the advantage of flexibility.

6. Command of the mobile troops on the divisional front will usually be vested in one commander. If the rear guard consists of one brigade, the mobile troops should be placed under its commander. When, however, more than one brigade is employed as rear guard the command of the mobile troops will usually be retained directly under the divisional commander; but when no divisional cavalry regiment is available, and the mobile troops consist of Bren carriers, M.Gs., and lorry borne infantry, it may be more suitable for the command of these troops to be vested in one commander on each brigade front—who will be responsible to the brigade commander of that front.

7. Reconnaissance parties sent back to reconnoitre the various positions must be fully representative—from the divisional commander downwards. Sometimes the commanders themselves will be free to attend, but when the troops concerned are in contact with the enemy, or likely to be, the commanders will be represented by deputies who, in the case of unit commanders, will usually be the seconds-in-command. Representatives must have full authority to formulate plans on the new positions.

Reconnaissance parties will in all cases be strong enough to make adequate preparations, and to provide guides to lead units into their positions.

7. Divisional cavalry regiments in the withdrawal

The most probable role of divisional cavalry regiments in the withdrawal will be to delay and harass the enemy's advance during the hours of daylight. They will best fulfil this role by holding, with the carrier troops, a succession of positions, against each one of which the enemy will be forced to engage seriously.

Light tank troops will be employed when necessary to cover the withdrawal of the carrier troops.

Boldness must be the keynote governing the action of the divisional cavalry regiment; and any overboldness on the part of the enemy must meet with immediate retribution in the form of vigorous counter attack.

The distances between the positions held should be short, so that the enemy is continually opposed throughout his

advance. Each, however, must be at a sufficient distance from the position in front to allow of the proper organization of the defence. Rearward reconnaissance—which must be continuous—will allow of the rapid occupation and organization of each position in turn.

8. Artillery in the withdrawal

1. The action of artillery in a withdrawal is fully discussed in Artillery Training, Volume I, Pamphlet No. 6, 1938, sec. 3, which should be read in conjunction with this pamphlet.

2. Generally the following principles should govern the withdrawal of the artillery :—

- i. The withdrawal plans should be framed by the higher commanders, e.g. that of corps artillery by the C.C.R.A., and that of divisions by the C.R.A.
- ii. The plan should be such that the maximum artillery is available for the defence of the rear guards during the most dangerous periods, i.e. during the holding of the rear guard position after the enemy gains contact with it until the position has been abandoned.
- iii. The plan must be such that an adequate number of guns is always in action to cover the rearmost troops whilst the withdrawal of the others is taking place. To achieve this measure of security the artillery must be continuously in depth.
- iv. All units which can fire on to the front of the rearmost troops will provide O.Ps. with these troops, not only to engage the enemy, but to ensure that the artillery is kept continuously informed of his movements and positions.
- v. The final withdrawal of guns will be made under the command of the formation commander in whose area they have been located. Guns withdrawn under rear guard orders will normally revert to the orders of C.C.R.A. or C.R.A. when they cross the line of the next rear guard position behind them.

9. Infantry in the withdrawal

1. Infantry, including machine gun battalions, supported by anti-tank guns and artillery, provide the garrisons of the rear guard defensive positions.

As the frontages to be held will always be wide, depth in these positions will have to be sacrificed in order to prevent gaps occurring in the front. If the position has only to be held during the hours of daylight in conditions of good visibility, and the country is suitable, such gaps as can be adequately covered by fire may be accepted. If, on the other hand, the position has to be held during the hours of darkness, or in bad visibility, or the ground is such that infiltration by the enemy is possible, the guarding of the whole length of the front will be necessary.

2. The withdrawal of the bulk of the rear guard infantry should be made under cover of darkness whenever possible. It may, however, often be necessary to retain some troops on the position till dawn—even when a night withdrawal is being made. In this event the latter troops will have to make a considerable portion of their movement in daylight, and if they are to avoid casualties they will have to move dispersed and across country.

3. An energetic enemy may cause heavy casualties to such troops unless he is checked. When mobile troops have been deployed on a line through which these bodies can move at dawn, they will usually provide the necessary check. In the absence of mobile troops, or if the latter are deployed too far back for the purpose, carrier platoons, with anti-tank guns in action on a suitable line, can be usefully employed to provide this support. Care must be taken that these weapons are not themselves pinned to the ground, and they must be sited accordingly.

4. Occasions for the employment of carriers and anti-tank guns in this way may also arise when it is necessary to withdraw from an intermediate position in daylight.

Whilst the position is being held, the carrier platoon will usually be retained as a reserve in the battalion commander's hands, either to stop a gap or to protect the flanks in case of a break-in elsewhere.

10. Army tanks in the withdrawal

1. Army tanks are essentially offensive units, and should be employed as such.

A high proportion of army tank units will generally be retained under the command of armies and corps to restore by offensive action the situation on any portion of the front where enemy pressure is threatening to disturb the steady progress of the withdrawal.

2. When available, even small bodies of tanks—such as a company—may be usefully employed with the rear guard. When so allotted they should be held in reserve until required. They may then be used to counter attack—either to restore the front, or to gain limited objectives to facilitate the disengagement of other troops.

11. Engineers in the withdrawal

1. In the withdrawal, centralized control of engineers will be the rule.

2. The primary task of engineers will be to delay the enemy with obstacles—mainly demolitions and road craters. Other tasks are:—

- i. Improvement of communications, including the passage of contaminated defiles.
- ii. Creation of obstacles on the flanks to prevent the enemy breaking through from neighbouring formations, or to protect an exposed flank.
- iii. Deliberate or hasty preparation of the various positions, including supervision of military and local labour, and collection of engineer stores. This task will require the exercise of considerable forethought. On each position every endeavour must be made to provide some form of anti-tank protection.

3. Engineer troops actually allotted to rear guards will have no responsibility in the preparation of the main demolition scheme. They should be held available for unexpected tasks with the rear guard, or for subsidiary demolitions to assist the rear guard.

4. As a safeguard against long range artillery fire and air bombardment, a proportion of engineers must be left with rearward divisions to keep open communications. This task may sometimes involve bridging operations.

12. Signals in the withdrawal

1. In the withdrawal, the cable communications previously established by higher formations will usually be available to fall back upon. Headquarters should, therefore, whenever possible, withdraw along existing arteries.

As good signal communications are essential for the conduct of a successful withdrawal, signal officers must be given an early intimation of plans. The signal lay-out for the various

positions will be begun as soon as the plan is decided, so that communication may be available by the time the positions are occupied.

2. Wireless is independent of the restrictions imposed by the routes of existing lines, and will therefore be developed to the fullest extent within the limits imposed by the orders for wireless silence.

13. Gas in the withdrawal

1. If restrictions in the employment of gas have been removed owing to the prior use of gas by the enemy, the measures taken to utilize this weapon must be carefully co-ordinated with the other methods adopted for delaying the enemy. Good organization and timing will be essential. Resources should not be dissipated, and where they are limited they should be concentrated, in the first place, on the contamination of the primary demolition belt.

2. The highest authority controlling the operation should lay down the general policy and allot the special units and ammunition accordingly. Within the division, formations and units should be told whether there are any restrictions on the use of their gas weapons.

3. Gas may be particularly effective against troops of whom considerable physical exertion has been required—as, for example, after a long advance—since the alertness upon which individual protection so largely depends is likely to be impaired by fatigue and loss of cohesion.

4. In general, the considerations which affect the use of choking, nose, and tear gases in the defence apply to the withdrawal also.

A feature of the use of blister gas in the withdrawal is that liquid blister gas can be applied directly to the surfaces which it is desired to contaminate.

In addition to obstacles on the demolition belt, all defiles which are difficult to avoid by deviation lend themselves to treatment by direct contamination—as also do localities likely to be occupied by the enemy as O.P.s., headquarters, billets, shelters, etc. Ground bombs may be used by infantry and engineers for the smaller sites, and for the larger sites, gas mines by the engineers and pioneer battalions. Vehicles specially equipped for depositing liquid blister gas will also be used for contaminating roads and gaps between obstacles.

5. Contamination alone will not stop determined troops on foot, although they may be delayed and suffer casualties from it. Armoured fighting vehicles and mechanical transport

are much less affected, and can traverse contaminated ground with little delay and little danger to the occupants.

6. Owing to the destruction of communications and the consequent congestion caused by the restriction in the numbers of forward routes available for the enemy, particularly good targets are likely to be offered for gas spray during a withdrawal, especially at night.

7. Enclosed areas such as villages and woods in which gas is likely to hang will present favourable targets for attack by projectors. It may often be possible to make the preliminary preparations beforehand, thus increasing the accuracy of the projector attack and the chances of surprise.

14. Preparation and execution of demolitions

1. The selection of the primary belt of demolitions will be the responsibility of the army commander and the bulk of the engineer resources should be concentrated upon it. Work must be begun early. If the withdrawal has not been foreseen, the belt must be placed sufficiently far back to allow time for the work to be carried out. The creation of effective blocks, and even the preparations for cratering by the camouflet method, may require the closing of roads during and after preparation. Roads and gaps to be kept open for traffic, and for the withdrawal of the rear guard, must therefore be defined, and arrangements made to ensure their last minute demolition.

The responsibility for ordering the firing of the charges that are left to be fired after the passage of the last troops will be laid down by the rear guard commander, who must be fully informed where these charges are placed. He may actually give the order himself for the destruction of an important bridge; more often he will delegate the responsibility to the unit commander of the sector affected, or, if mobile troops are out, to their commander. An engineer officer or selected N.C.O. will always be in charge of the demolition party. He will be given in writing the title of the officer to whom has been entrusted the duty of ordering the demolition, and any other special instructions regarding the time or circumstances of the demolition. His instructions will include an order to blow his charges should the enemy reach a given point or line—which will generally be selected as that beyond which any further advance is liable to prevent the completion of the demolition.

It will usually be necessary to provide a special protection—especially against armoured fighting vehicles—for the

engineers detailed to execute last-minute demolitions. If a covering party has not been provided, the engineer officer or N.C.O. in charge of the demolitions should apply for the necessary protection to the commander of the unit or formation in whose sector his demolition lies.

As soon as a bridge has been destroyed, the engineer officer or N.C.O. in charge will report to the headquarters which ordered it the time of demolition and the extent of damage effected.

15. The air in the withdrawal

1. *Air superiority.*—The maintenance of air superiority is of the utmost importance. Not only is effective reconnaissance essential to the successful conduct of rear guard operations, but, further, the enemy must be prevented from disorganizing the withdrawal by attack from the air. The latter form of attack is less likely to be effective, and will certainly be expensive, if attempted in the face of determined air opposition even of inferior strength.

2. *Direct participation in rear guard action.*—At the same time a situation of real emergency may arise in which the one overriding consideration will be to hold up the advance of the enemy and enable our own force to get clear. Under these conditions interference with reconnaissance and the risk of attack by enemy aircraft may become matters of secondary importance, and the commander may decide to divert all available aircraft—including even those of army co-operation squadrons—to assist the rear guards by direct participation in the battle with bombs and machine guns. Low-flying action in conditions of this sort may be extremely effective, and may even restore a situation which would otherwise become fatal; but it will inevitably involve serious casualties to the aircraft engaged, which should revert to their usual roles as soon as the emergency has passed.

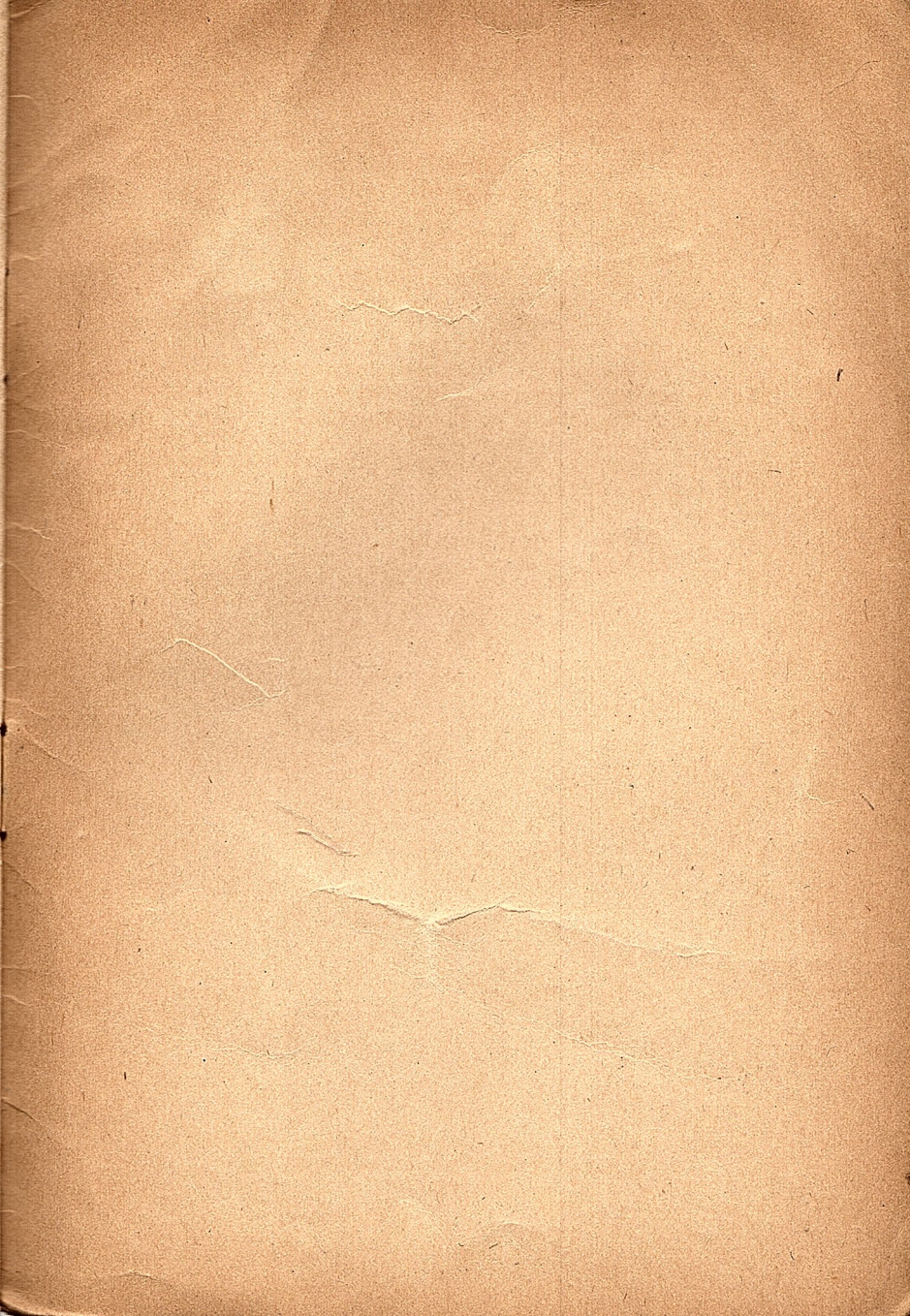
3. *Employment of fighter aircraft.*—As regards the employment of fighter aircraft in this role, it should be borne in mind that the modern fighter does not carry bombs, and owing to its great speed and shallow angle of dive when near the ground, can only bring its guns to bear on a ground target for a very short space of time. It may, therefore, be best employed in its usual role to maintain local and temporary air superiority within a certain area for a limited period. By this means it can provide a measure of "cover" for troops passing through a dangerous defile and seriously impede the enemy's air reconnaissance over that area.

Should it be necessary to employ fighters in the attack of objectives on the ground, these attacks should be directed against suitable targets such as formed bodies of troops on the march. Action by fighter aircraft will seldom, if ever, be effective against forces deployed or in prepared positions.

4. *Reconnaissance.*—Reconnaissance must be continuous throughout the withdrawal, to discover and report hostile movements, particularly against the flanks of the rear guard. Particular attention must be paid to the movement of enemy armoured fighting vehicles.

In addition, during a withdrawal, the control of scattered portions of the force by the commander may be difficult, and aircraft may be required to locate our own units; they may also be required for intercommunication.

Air observation for the artillery must be provided to enable them to engage the enemy at a distance and thus take full advantage of their range.





This manual has been scanned by the
Vickers MG Collection & Research Association

www.vickersmg.org.uk

Please support the work of the Association.

Click on the image to donate through
PayPal:



Or regularly support us through
Patreon:



Or make a quick, single donation:



A not-for-profit company, limited by guarantee, registered in England, Company Registration Number 07855202